

Testimony before the House Education Committee
on
HB 2345
submitted by
Dr. George Griffith, Superintendent, Trego County USD #208

Chair Ron Highland and members of the House Education Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share my comments on behalf of Trego County Schools and to express the concerns related to HB 2345.

The opposition we have to HB 2345 is that it is a measure that could impact the local control of school districts and prevent anyone with an above average knowledge of the education system from serving on a school board. I have served in districts in which it would be difficult not to have a spouse, sibling, or even an individual involved with education in some manner across the state. People who work for schools in any manner are dedicated individuals with a desire to help children and are not in education for the money especially board members. In my experience, I have seen that regardless of the career (medical, political, legal, agriculture, welding and many others) many family members take similar career paths or have similar interests. This happens in education even when told to avoid being an educator by other family members which is currently happening in Kansas.

In addition to the local control issue, there are additional concerns with HB 2345 specifically related to rural school districts including Trego County U.S.D. #208. Rural districts currently struggle to find community members willing to run for school board positions for various reasons and this bill will make it more difficult to find candidates based on:

- The availability of quality and qualified staff in many rural districts would often result in violation of this bill. This would result from the limited number of individuals who are interested in and willing to volunteer to serve on the board of education.
- Individuals who manage or have important roles in local businesses would also lead to possible violations to this bill. The businesses these elected board members work for have usually been doing business for years with the local school district and are many times the only supplier within a reasonable driving distance that can supply fuel or other important services to the district. These individuals bring important business knowledge to the board in ways to save money and are good at thinking outside the box.

Finally, there are other laws and regulations in place that are designed to prevent board members from voting in a member of their family or having a controlling interest in a local business. HB 2345 is an overreaction and too broad in addressing any issues that may exist.

As a superintendent for the last eight years, I have only have dealt with one issue that was a concern related to a conflict of interest. Currently a board member with a clear conflict of interest is the only person allowed to declare he or she has a conflict. This issue could easily be addressed if the board had the authority to vote to require a member who has an obvious conflict of interest to leave the meeting during the discussion and vote related to this conflict. Although rare in my experience, I feel addressing this one issue would take care of the concerns this bill seems to be trying to address.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 2345.

Respectfully,

Dr. George Griffith, Superintendent USD#208